

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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SUBJECT: MAY 13TH PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON AUSTRALIA'S VIETNAM
POLICIES

REF: CANBERRA 2646

1. THE LONG AWAITED DEBATE ON THE GOA'S VIETNAM POLICIES, WHICH
WAS TRIGGERED BY THE PUBLICATION OF CABLES TO THE AUSTRALIAN
MISSIONS IN SAIGON AND HANOI (REFTEL) TOOK PLACE MAY 13.

2. OPPOSITION LEADER FRASER MOVED A MOTION TO CENSURE THE
GOVERNMENT. HE BASED HIS ATTACK ON THE VIEW THAT THE TWO
CABLES REVEALED THE GOVERNMENT'S BIAS IN FAVOR OF HANOI AND
THE PRG AND ASSERTED THAT PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM HAD MISLED
THE PARLIAMENT AND THE AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE WHEN HE STATED ON
APRIL 8 THAT COMMUNICATIONS TO BOTH SIDES WERE ESSENTIALLY THE
SAME. COUNTRY LEADER, DOUG ANTHONY, SECONDED THE ATTACK
IN A SPEECH WHICH, IN ANTHONY'S USUAL FASHION, ACCUSED THE
PRIME MINISTER AND HIS PARTY OF JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT
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WAS WRONG IN AUSTRALIA TODAY FROM FOREIGN POLICY TO MISLEAD-

ING THE PARLIAMENT, INFLATION, UNEMPLOYMENT, DISREGARD FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM, AND SUPPORTING COMMUNISM. ANTHONY NEGLECTED TO ACCUSE THE GOVERNMENT OF BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR ORIGINAL SIN BUT THIS WAS PROBABLY MERELY AN OVERSIGHT ON HIS PART.

3. THE PRIME MINISTER RESPONDED WITH A TOUGH STATEMENT IN WHICH HE FLATLY DENIED THE CHARGE OF MISLEADING THE PARLIAMENT, AND TABLED A NUMBER OF DFA COMMUNICATIONS WHICH PURPORTED TO PROVE THAT AUSTRALIA TREATED BOTH HANOI AND SAIGON IN AN EVENHANDED MANNER. HE THEN REITERATED HIS GOVERNMENT'S VIEW THAT THE INDOCHINA CONFLICT WAS A CIVIL WAR AND THAT HE HAD BEEN TRYING TO FIND A POLITICAL SOLUTION TO THE CONFLICT RATHER THAN A MILITARY SOLUTION, AS THE OPPOSITION ALLEGEDLY DID WHEN IT WAS IN POWER. SCIENCE MINISTER MORRISON BACKED UP THE PRIME MINISTER WITH A PEDESTRIAN SPEECH WHICH IN QUALITY AND CONTENT WAS SOMEWHAT BELOW THAT OF MR. ANTHONY'S.

4. THE HOUSE THEN VOTED ON THE CENSURE MOTION WHICH WAS DEFEATED BY A STRAIGHT PARTY VOTE OF 63-58. A SIMILAR MOTION WAS DEFEATED IN THE SENATE BY A 28-28 VOTE, WITH FOUR SENATORS ABSENT ON PAIRS AND TWO INDEPENDENT SENATORS SUPPORTED GOVERNMENT. UNDER SENATE RULE A TIED MOTION IS CONSIDERED TO BE REJECTED.

5. COMMENT: FRASER'S SPEECH WAS WELL PREPARED AND FACTUAL. MOST OBSERVERS FELT THAT HE READ IT TOO QUICKLY AND THAT HIS DELIVERY WAS WOODEN. WHITLAM, ON THE OTHER HAND, MADE A VIGOROUS PRESENTATION OF A WEAKER CASE. HE PERFORMS WELL IN THE HOUSE AND IN THIS INSTANCE WON THE DEBATE ON POINTS. THE OUTCOME OF THE CENSURE MOTION WAS NEVER IN DOUBT AS IT WAS CLEAR FROM THE OUTSET THAT THE LABOR SIDE STOOD FIRMLY BEHIND ITS LEADER.
GREEN

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